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Bruce E. Mahan

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Old Livery Stables

Another enduring memory of my boyhood days in Bedford half a century ago is that of the old livery stables and feed barns. Bedford had six of them when I lived there and each enjoyed a liberal patronage.

In his delightful book, *Main Street on the Middle Border*, Lewis Atherton writes:

As a focal point in the age of horsedrawn transportation, the livery stable had a form, a personality, and an odor as distinctive as that of its twentieth century successor, the garage and the automobile showroom.

This was certainly true of the livery stables and feed barns in Bedford.

On my last trip to Bedford, Ben Scane showed me an old pocket card which read:

*Corson and Burrows
Livery and Feed
Good Rigs
Reasonable Rates
Bedford and Gravity Hack
Bedford, Iowa*

The owners were C. C. Corson and Dave Burrows; and this was the "Livery, Feed and Sale Stable" operated later for many years by William

H. Churchill and James Daugherty. It was located immediately north of the present Reynolds Body Shop.

Bedford's longtime liveryman, A. C. Kinnison, first operated a barn on what is now the rear of the Country Boys Lumber and Concrete business. *The Bedford Centennial History* shows Clark Kinnison standing at the side of the large, square, center doorway of this barn and the famous George Wellington Streeter in the driver's seat of the Bedford House Bus ready for a trip to the depot. A sign on the high, rounded top of the building read "A. C. Kinnison's Barn." An open doorway on the second floor disclosed a well-filled haymow and a door and bay window to the south marked the site of the office.

Later, for many years, Mr. Kinnison operated the Bonner Livery Stable on East Main Street. The Keith Brothers, William C. and J. H. Keith, took over the former "Kinnison's Barn" where they bought and sold horses and mules.

During my boyhood, the R. L. Whittington Livery and Feed Stable occupied a large, sprawling structure that was owned and operated for many years by John D. Van Reenan, uncle of Floyd Van Reenan, who now has a feed store at the same location. The McMahill Livery and Feed Barn, which was operated by Matt and Fred McMahill, filled the entire corner, now the site of the Bedford Oil Company's Office and Filling Sta-

tion and the J. I. Case Farm Machinery buildings.

O. D. Laird, harness and leather merchant, had a livery stable for a time on Main Street. J. A., Harry, and Philip Evans carried on their horse buying and selling activities across the street.

The Bonner Livery Stable was a pretentious building of light-colored brick construction with ornamental grey stonework above the doors and windows and across the top of its classic facade. A 5- by 6-foot sign with the picture of a near life-size horse and the words "Bonner Stable" on each side swung out on a strong iron brace above the large oval-topped center doorway. The keystone of the arch over this doorway bore the chiseled figures, "1880," the date when the structure was built. This stable, it is said, took its name from a man who owned and operated it in the 1880's.

The building stood on a sidehill with the main floor opening directly onto Main Street, and the ground floor opening onto an alley at the rear. Hay was pulled into the loft of the stable by means of a fork, rope, and pulley arrangement through a wide door in the rear of the building. Inside, feed chutes connected the second-floor hayloft with mangers on the main floor and ground floor stalls. A well, pump, and trough near the basement rear doors furnished a convenient watering place for the horses, and water for the wash rack in a nearby corner where vehicles were washed and polished and wheels greased. A cleated ramp inside

the basement, west of the rear doors, provided easy access for the horses from the ground-level stalls to the main floor where vehicles were stored and hitching took place.

Some of the show horses kept at this stable occupied box stalls on the main floor. I remember well the matched team owned by the late Senator George L. Finn and the fancy rubber-tired buggy in which he would ride proudly up and down Main and Court streets. Senator Finn, like some other Bedford citizens, left his team at a livery stable to be fed and groomed and his buggy to be washed.

During the early nineties my uncle, Ellis P. Titus, owned and operated the Bonner Stable; and my grandfather, Francis Titus, helped as a driver when he was needed. An old picture in my mother's collection shows Uncle Ellis standing in front of the office door, Carr McCloud holding a beautiful black horse by the halter in the large open doorway, and a man who looks like my father, Thomas S. Mahan, standing in front of one of the two east windows. All three men were dressed up for the occasion in the style of that day.

Grandfather Titus often recounted his experiences in taking traveling men and their sample trunks to Gravity or Blockton in a Bummer Wagon. Uncle Ellis used to buy horses and ship them to Missouri for sale and to buy mules in Missouri for shipment to and resale in Iowa. This was a lucrative sideline to the livery stable operation.

The other livery and feed barns in Bedford were large, rambling structures built of wood with many stalls on the ground floor and a capacious haymow overhead.

The inside arrangements and contents of these stables were very similar to those described by Lewis Atherton in his *Main Street on the Middle Border*. Each had a small office at the front with one door opening onto the street and one into the barn itself. Each was equipped with an old desk, a few kitchen chairs, a Round Oak stove with a box for wood or coal, an iron cot with smelly horse blankets for bedding, and a lantern hanging on a nail near the door. An attendant stayed all night at each livery stable to answer calls and to guard against fire. As Atherton records:

Harness for each animal hung on wooden pegs at the front of the stall. . . . Curry combs, hair clippers, sponges, axle grease, harness soap, and pitchforks were scattered through the building at points most convenient for their use. . . . All stables had the mingled smell of horse urine and manure, harness oil, feed, and cured hay.

The Bedford livery stables together provided a wide variety of vehicles for hire including buggies, carriages, single-seated cutters and two-seated sleighs, bobsleds, Bummer Wagons, hacks, and surreys with fringed tops.

One stable kept the town's sprinkling equipment — a large wooden tank on wagon-running gears, with the driver's seat on top in front, and a

long metal sprinkling tube with curved ends at the rear. An old picture in *The Bedford Centennial History* shows Andy Miller (father of Bill and Abe) in the driver's seat of the sprinkling tank rounding the corner of Main and Court streets with his matched greys — *Scott* and *Prince*. Bedford's streets were unpaved in those days, and frequent sprinkling was needed to keep down the dust.

Two of Bedford's livery stables furnished the fancy depot buses, one for the Clifton House (earlier called the Pacific House), and one for the Bedford House. Two other stables provided the elaborately carved black hearses and handsomely matched black teams for the town's two undertakers.

The hearses were ornamental vehicles with plate glass sides and handsomely carved corner posts and side panels. Both had classic, slightly curved tops with looped, fringed drapes and silver-plated guide rails inside. The somber-faced driver sat in front. One of these fronts was a carved creation, one had fringed drapes on the sides and back, and both had large, polished box lamps on each side. These hearses were a promise to the people of Bedford that their last ride would be taken in luxury and splendor.

Each of the two fancy buses had a high raised seat projecting in front of the body for the driver, an oval top with metal side railings to hold luggage, a center door with steps at the rear, and

plush covered seats running lengthwise inside. The hotel names were boldly lettered on the body strip above the four windows on each side, and the curved body panels below the front, back, and side windows were gaily decorated with colorful scrolls and elaborate designs.

When trains arrived — morning, noon, afternoon, and night — the hotel buses with prancing horses were there to meet them. The drivers called out the names and attractions of their hotels in picturesque phrases, vying with each other to attract passengers. A trip from the depot to the uptown hotels cost 25 cents. Long remembered are such bus drivers as Capt. Streeter, Bill Miller, John Scane, John Kilfoy, and others.

The Bummer Wagons, sometimes called hacks, were light spring wagons with three seats crosswise and a top. Each livery stable had one of these — one was used daily on trips to Gravity and one to Blockton for which passengers paid 50 cents and \$1 each way. Sometimes these vehicles were used for special trips by traveling men, and then two rear seats would be removed for sample trunks. Four dollars per day for hack and driver was a common charge for this service.

Another type of hack or bus, which was used by Bedford liverymen, had a driver's seat in front, a canopied top, leather seats along each side, and steps in the rear. These were used to carry passengers from the present post office corner to the

fairground at 10 cents each, to haul baseball players and high school football teams to neighboring towns, and on Memorial Day to transport men and women, too old or feeble to march in the parade, from the Court House Square to the Bedford and Fairview cemeteries. When the fancy depot buses wore out, these vehicles were used to meet the trains.

Saturday was a busy day at Bedford's livery stables and feed barns, for that was the day country people came to town to do their trading. Many farmers would leave their teams at the stables to be fed and watered. The cost for unhitching a team, giving the horses hay and water, and hitching them up again when the farmer and his family were ready to go home was 20 cents per head, or 40 cents per head if corn was included as feed, according to my old friend, Virgil Kinnison, of Ottawa, Kansas. During the day, buggies and wagons would be lined up at right angles to the board sidewalks in front of the livery stables with wagon tongues and buggy shafts pointing skyward braced up by neck yokes.

Another busy day at the livery stables was Sunday when Bedford swains took their best girls out for a ride in polished and spotless top buggies. Reservations had to be made well in advance to secure these rigs, and the charge of \$2 to \$2.50 for an afternoon was considered a good investment.

Horse and mule sales at the Keith Brothers

Barn, at the Evans Sales Barn, or at the Churchill and Daugherty Stable attracted buyers not only from the Bedford vicinity but also from many points in southwestern Iowa and northwestern Missouri. Work horses, race horses, and Missouri mules would be led into the sale ring and be sold under the hammer of such popular auctioneers as Cols. J. S. Hanshaw and Roy Clayton, and the Chilcote Brothers, J. H. and E. H., then of Conway. Some of the Bedford liverymen and horse buyers owned and advertised fine stallions for stud purposes and for sale.

Although Bedford had no saloons during my boyhood, men who wanted a nip of whiskey knew where to buy a bottle locally. Beer, too, by the case or in kegs could be ordered from distributors in Maryville or St. Joseph, Missouri. Unoccupied stalls in livery stables offered secure and convenient accommodations for farmers and their town friends to engage in a little social drinking occasionally, either with or without the owner's consent. Mangers and feed boxes were handy places in which to toss empty bottles. A boyhood friend of mine, Horace Daugherty, and I used to secure our spending money by gathering up these empty prescription-type bottles after school, washing them at my home on Saturday mornings, then selling them at one cent each to local druggists.

Bedford's livery stables also provided a favorite loafing place for farmers and their town friends.

Men would sit by the hour in a crowded office or on the sidewalk outside exchanging gossip, playing cards, or telling tall tales about the exploits of Bedford's Civil War heroes or the more recent experiences of Co. I boys in the Philippine Insurrection. Boys of my day would listen, goggle-eyed, to this robust conversation of their elders.

During the 1880's and 1890's, and after the turn of the century, Bedford's liverymen and feed barn operators contributed much to the business activity of my home town. But the coming of the automobile spelled the doom of the livery stables as it did that of the old blacksmith shops. All of the wooden livery stables of my boyhood have been torn down. Even the famous Bonner Stable was remodeled and used for a time as an automobile garage and sales room, then converted into a warehouse and hatchery, and later to bowling alleys. Its ornamental and attractive brick and stone facade has been covered with a thick layer of cement; and the date, 1880, once carved in the keystone of the center doorway arch, is lost forever.

BRUCE E. MAHAN